

# FOLIO<sup>TM</sup>

May 2008 FOLIO: 23

**ALWAYS ONE OF THE MOST** challenging periods to sell, a first-quarter revenue shortfall can set the tone for the rest of the year. Here, a cross-section of magazine publishers, both consumer and b-to-b, offer tips, strategies and best practices for pushing through a tough sell period while minimizing damage.



**John Maisel**, publisher,  
*Electrical Contractor Magazine*

When you have a really bad quarter, the first thing is don't panic. Remember, it is quarter one. Most of our budgeting expense items haven't been spent yet. And yet, depending on accounting systems, some publishers say let's stop everything.

For publishers, most fixed expenses—paper, printing and people—are under contract. It's important for publishers who have a position in the market to resist making noticeable downgrades to things like paper and certainly be careful with your people. The question I ask with these downgrades is, are they really going to be worth it in the long run?

With important projects, prioritize them if you haven't already. You can always add the stuff back or resurrect it, but don't wait for quarter two, three or four. Focus your marketing and sales efforts on your best customers and prospects. Make sure you're protecting your base. You may not do as much new business development. Take care of those high-valued customers we all have that basically pay the rent.

Also, don't hibernate. Stay aggressive. Support your sales team. You don't want to end up weaker when the cycle begins again. Research has shown that those companies who at least maintained their marketing through these downturns come out in a much stronger position and their market share increases. My least expensive share of voice has come when everybody else cut back.



**Tom Morrissey**, publisher, *OK*

We're currently up 47.2 percent in pages and 32.9 percent in ad revenue. That doesn't mean we don't feel that it's a tight market, but it's nice to be in this position.

Be ubiquitous—the answers are not in your

office. Be on the street. Entertain more. Be around your customers. Let your salespeople see that you're willing to make more calls than anyone.

Avoid paralysis by analysis—we tend to savor numbers when they're good and stare and fret over them when they're bad. No amount of estimating will replace time on the street.

Done well, a sales call challenge for the staff during slow times can be motivating, fun and can produce results that ultimately happen when you're out there. Also, special, quick-hit deals can help—buy two pages in quarter one and get X later on, for example.



**Henry Boys**,  
publisher, *Harvard Business Review*

I tend to focus on two things—prioritization and targeting. People tend to think that if clients aren't going to buy, then what's the point?

Or they become frantic and start running around talking to everyone possible, trying to get a sale. I try to get people to slow down and think about what elements of the conversations are really having purchase.

I really try to combat against the shotgun approach, talking more and more to wider groups of folks. In my experience the wider and wider net exhausts people and doesn't really affect the bottom line as much. It can make you more diffuse, making it harder and harder to make a compelling case that someone should use their limited funds to invest with you.

For additional revenue, I look usually around the realm of digital or syndicated content offerings for a lower cost of goods sold item. I don't really look to events for that kind of stuff. It depends, but events usually require high input and longer lead time. I also tend to look at my business development pipeline, a full database I keep of ideas, to see if one or two things offer relative speed to market, ease of implementation and a reasonable cost of goods sold. It's a matter of trying to create good closing speed. I try to green-light some things I might otherwise have waited on, or I look at the editorial idea that needs a champion that readers will respond to and advertisers will want to message through. ■

**-6.4%**

DECLINE IN 1<sup>ST</sup>  
QUARTER 2008  
PIB AD PAGES.